

Description

[APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR ELECTRONIC FUSE WITH IMPROVED ESD TOLERANCE]

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0001] Field of the Invention

[0002] The invention generally relates to the optimization of electronic fuses, and more particularly to a method and apparatus for an electronic fuse polysilicon resistor for high current applications and increase resistance to ESD (electrostatic discharge) failure.

[0003] Background Description

[0004] Optimization of a polysilicon electronic fuse element is important for fuse initiation and verification of such initiation, and prevention of failure from ESD events. ESD events can lead to destructive failure of fuse elements.

[0005] Figure 1 illustrates an example of a related art electronic fuse resistor 10 having a salicided polysilicon film 14

overlying a polysilicon film 12. The related art fuse 10 also includes metal contacts 16 in electrical communication with the salicided polysilicon film 14. To maintain a low resistance, the related art electronic fuse 10 is of a relatively narrow width.

[0006] Figure 2 illustrates a cross-section of the related art electronic fuse 10 along line A-A' of Figure 1. As can be seen in the cross-section, the polysilicon film 12 and the salicided polysilicon film 14 of the related art fuse 10 are about the same width. Furthermore, the salicided polysilicon film 14 forms a single continuous conductor providing a single current flow path which is distributed over the entire the surface of the polysilicon film 12.

[0007] In the related art fuses, the width of the salicided polysilicon film 14 is the same as the width of the polysilicon film 12. Consequently, as the polysilicon film 12 is made larger to withstand larger currents, the salicided polysilicon film 14 becomes larger and requires higher current loads to blow. Conversely, as the salicided polysilicon film 14 is reduced in size to blow at smaller currents, the polysilicon film 12 becomes more susceptible to damage.

[0008] As a result, the window in which to blow the salicide film 14 and maintain the integrity of the insulator 12 and re-

lated polysilicon line is narrow. In other words, there is a small difference between the minimum current necessary to blow the fuse and the amount of current which will damage the insulator supporting the salicided film 12. As such, the current pulse width to implement the fuse blow is limited to a relatively narrow given time and current domain. Accordingly, a blown fuse may be accompanied by a damaged insulator impairing functioning of the associated circuit.

[0009] At electric currents above the critical current-to-failure, the related art polysilicon fuse resistor structure can lead to metal blistering, extrusion and melting. High current flow through the structure of related art fuses can lead to cracking of the insulator films due to high thermal and mechanical stress. Thermal gradients in the surrounding insulator which may lead to mechanical stresses which exceed the yield stress can lead to insulator cracking. Such cracking can cause loss of integrity of the dielectric and semiconductor chip. Accordingly, related art fuses may malfunction when blowing upon the application of high currents.

[0010] Hence, because related art fuses are susceptible to damage due to high currents, a structure which can sustain

high currents and maintain structural integrity and yet lead to fuse initiation and removal of the salicide during the fuse initiation is needed.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

- [0011] In a first aspect of the invention, an electronic fuse is provided. The electronic fuse includes an insulating film and at least one conductive region partially covering the insulating film. At least one non-conductive region is provided on the insulating film adjacent the conductive region.
- [0012] In another aspect of the invention, the electronic fuse includes a polysilicon film with a top surface and a conductive film disposed on the top surface of the polysilicon film forming a plurality of separate conductive regions. Non-conductive regions are provided between the plurality of separate conductive regions.
- [0013] In another aspect of the invention, a method is provided for forming a fuse. The method includes forming and defining an insulator film, and forming at least one conductive region adjacent to at least one non-conductive region on a surface of the insulator film.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

- [0014] Figure 1 illustrates a related art electronic fuse resistor

structure;

[0015] Figure 2 illustrates a cross-section taken along A-A" of Figure 1;

[0016] Figure 3 illustrates an example of an embodiment of the electronic fuse resistor structure;

[0017] Figure 4 illustrates a cross-section taken along B-B' of Figure 3;

[0018] Figure 5 illustrates a cross-section of another embodiment of the invention;

[0019] Figure 6 illustrates a mask for depositing conductive regions on an insulator;

[0020] Figure 7 illustrates forming a conductive film into conductive strips; and

[0021] Figure 8 is a graph of resistance versus number of intact conductive strips for an electronic fuse.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0022] The invention relates to the optimization of electronic fuses, and more particularly to a method and apparatus for an electronic fuse polysilicon resistor for high current applications and increase resistance to ESD (electrostatic discharge) failure. In the invention, a conductive region is provided on the surface of an insulator with a non-conductive region adjacent thereto. The insulator may

also be a resistor. By positioning a conductive region adjacent to a non-conductive region on the insulator, thermal stress in the insulator due to current flowing through the conductive region is spread over a larger area, thus reducing the localized peak stress in the insulator. With stress reduced in such a manner, higher currents may pass through the conductive region without causing damage to the insulator. Accordingly, the fuse structure tends to maintain its structural integrity at high currents, making it suitable for some types of high current applications.

[0023] The invention also divides current into localized flow-paths or conductive regions, and those flow-paths are distributed across the surface of an insulator or resistor. Such a distribution of current over the surface reduces thermal stresses in the insulator or resistor, and reduces the risk of damage to the underlying insulator or resistor substrate in high current applications. Additionally, the structure has a high tolerance to high current and maintains structural and material integrity under high current applications which reduces the possibility of failure due to ESD or high current. The invention also provides an electronic fuse blow resistor structure where structure integrity remains intact after the fuse blows and, addition-

ally, has a well controlled failure process to facilitate distinguishing between an "open" and a "short" circuit. The invention also provides a high tolerance resistor element for high current RF applications.

[0024] Referring now to the drawings, Figure 3 illustrates an example of an embodiment of the invention generally depicted at reference numeral 20. The structure includes a polysilicon film or insulator 12 which supports a fuse 18. The fuse 18 may be defined as including conductive regions or strips 22 or may be the conductive strips in addition to the polysilicon film. The conductive strips 22 are separated from one another by a non-conductive region 24. The insulator 12 also supports fuse leads 26, which are in electrical contact or communication with the conductive strips 22. The structure 20 also includes metal contacts 16 which are in electrical communication with the fuse leads 26. The fuse leads 26 are located at opposite ends of each conductive region 22. The insulator 12 may also be a resistive film forming a resistive element. It should be understood that the fuse may include only one conductive region adjacent to only one non-conductive region.

[0025] Although Figure 3 shows the conductive regions of uni-

form width and approximately parallel to one another, other conductor patterns are contemplated with use by the invention. For example, some applications may benefit from the conductor having various widths or various lengths relative to one another. Other applications may have the distance between the conductors vary in a prescribed pattern or have a non-parallel pattern. By way of one illustrative example, non parallel strips may be provided.

[0026] Figure 4 illustrates a cross-section of the embodiment of the invention 20 shown in Figure 3 taken along line B-B'. As can be seen in the cross-section, conductive regions 22 are positioned on top of the insulator 12. Each conductive region 22 is separated from adjacent conductive regions 22 by a non-conductive region 24. Where only one conductive region 22 is provided, only one non-conductive region 24 may also be provided. The non conductive region may include known insulation material or an air gap, for instance.

[0027] In addition to various the conductor patterns mentioned above, certain embodiments may have conductors of 100 to 400 Å in thickness, for example, with a width and lengths being a function of the application, all depending

on the resistance value desired. Additional examples of materials from which to make the conductors include salicided polysilicon and various metals, such as, for example, aluminum, copper, titanium or other refractory materials.

[0028] In operation, current flows through metal contacts 16 and a fuse lead 26. The current then flows through the conductive regions or strips 22 to the opposite fuse lead 26 and corresponding metal contact 16. By having multiple conductive regions 22 separated by non-conductive regions 24, current flow is directed along discrete local paths distributed across the top of the insulator 12. Such localized and separate paths of current flow on top of the insulator 12 and reduce thermal stress within the insulator 12. Thus, the insulator 12 can withstand higher levels of current flow through the conductive regions 22 before being stressed to failure. However, because the cross-sectional area of all the conductive regions 22 is still relatively small, the fuse will blow at current levels similar to the related art fuse.

[0029] Where the insulator 12 is a polysilicon film or resistor, allowing for a wider polysilicon film or resistor can also lead to the prevention of the polysilicon film or resistor failure.

By allowing the polysilicon film to be wider, the failure of the polysilicon film will be lessened because the thermal stresses therein will be reduced. Such a molten filamentation occurs in the polysilicon resistor element when the current exceeds the P_{crit} , i.e.; the critical power to failure of the polysilicon film. Such failure can be calculated as follows:

$$[0030] \quad V(a)^2 = (I^2 g_{ox} T_m / g_l d_p d_{ox}) (1 - F(a)) / (30 - F(a)) \text{ Eq. 1}$$

$$[0031] \quad F(a) = \tanh (\alpha(a-w)/2) / \tanh (\alpha a/2) \text{ Eq. 2}$$

$$[0032] \quad \alpha^2 = r_{Si} g_{ox} / d_p d_{ox} \text{ Eq. 3}$$

[0033] V is voltage, r is resistance, T_m is temperature of a metal, w is width of a line, "a" is a parameter of constriction of the line, g_{ox} is gate conductance, g_l is film conductance, d_p is the thickness of the polysilicon and d_{ox} is the thickness of the oxide.

[0034] The failure of polysilicon film is also well determined from ESD testing of unsalicided polysilicon resistor elements. ESD experimental results show that the ESD robustness increases with the width of the polysilicon strip. Hence, the ESD robustness of the element also increases with the width of the polysilicon fuse or resistor. However, by using a salicide block mask to form conductive regions, the

current can be limited to the salicide film or conductive regions leading to failure of the conductor without rupture of the polysilicon film or resistor.

[0035] The ESD robustness of an individual wire is a function of the cross sectional area. The smaller the cross sectional area of the wire, the lower the ESD robustness, which can lead to improved accuracy of the digitization. It should also be understood that the more strips, at a smaller cross section will also provide more discrete digitization. For example, 20 strips at 5 microns will have a more discrete digitization than 10 strips at 10 microns, even though there is a same cross sectional area. This is because there are more strips that can "blow" thus increasing the step-wise digitization of a device.

[0036] The conductive regions of the electronic fuse or resistor are configured so that the electrical resistances will be "digitized" and the resistance will undergo step changes as the number of conductive regions or fingers of the salicide film begins to fail. The digitation of the conductor strips will allow digitized sensing levels which are helpful for digital circuits to determine the failure of one or more of the conductive regions or fingers. In electrical failure, damage can lead to non-uniformities and irregularities in

the resistance magnitude. Using conductive regions such as a salicide finger set, the optimization of the circuit and fuse resistance magnitudes will step through the failure points as particular conductive regions rupture or fail. This method may allow an improved sensing scheme well suited to digital circuits.

[0037] Referring to Figure 5, another embodiment of the electronic fuse 30 is shown, where an insulator 12 supports conductive regions 22. The conductive regions 22 have non-conductive regions therebetween which are at least partially filled with a solid, liquid, or semi-solid non-conductive material 28. It should be understood that the non-conductive material 28 may be porous, and in some cases may include a combination of gas, liquid and solid. The non-conductive material 28 may have good electrical insulating properties. In one aspect of the invention, the non-conductive material 28 is resistant to damage due to thermal and mechanical stresses.

[0038] Figure 6 illustrates a mask on an insulator 12 for forming multiple conductive regions or paths on the surface of the insulator. As in Figures 3 and 4, the insulator 12 may also be a resistive material forming a resistive element. By using a salicide block mask, a plurality of salicided regions

can be formed on a polysilicon film. By creation of narrow width parallel conductive regions, current can be constricted to regions on the salicide region without the failure of the underlying insulator or resistor. In this fashion, the width of the polysilicon fuse or resistor width can be increased as to avoid failure due to thermal stress.

[0039] As another example, a salicide block mask may be used to form a set of conductive regions or comb fingers of salicided regions. Such a structure will cause current to flow along narrow stripes of the salicided region. As the current increases, the salicide fingers will blow leading to opening of the fuse with minimized thermal stress in the underlying substrate.

[0040] Referring to Figure 7, an illustration of how a conductive sheet 15 can be sub-divided into multiple conductive regions 14 is shown. Thus, by forming the conductive sheet 15 as multiple conductive regions 14, current can be directed along discrete localized paths thereby reducing thermal stresses on any underlining insulator or resistor. However, because the total cross-section of the multiple conductive regions 14 is similar to that of the conductive sheet 15, the current carrying capacity of the multiple conductive regions 14 is comparable to that of the con-

ductive sheet 15. It should be noted that the conductive regions 14 are typically formed by depositing a conductor onto an insulator or resistor on which a mask has been formed to produce the conductive regions 14. The conductive regions 14 may also be formed by etching the conductor to have non-conductive regions.

[0041] Figure 8 illustrates the step response change in resistance of the electronic fuse or resistor as conductive regions or strips are blown or ruptured. As shown in the graph, the electronic fuse has the lowest resistance when no conductive strip has been ruptured. When a single conductive region or strip ruptures, the resistance of the fuse increases by a pre-determine amount to a prescribed level. In like manner, as further conductive regions are ruptured the resistance increases stepwise until it reaches a maximum value when all the conductive strips have blown. The change in resistance for each step, and the resistance value for each step may be determined by forming the underlying insulator or resistor film and the conductive regions of suitable materials and dimensions.

[0042] By structuring the fuse to blow in discrete steps, the fuse blows in a more predictable manner. Additionally, the fuse will have as many blow-steps as there are conductive re-

gions. The stepwise blowing of the fuse reduces the chance that the fuse will malfunction by partially blowing and still conduct some current. Such a failure mode is further avoided because of the reduced thermal stress in the underlying insulator or resistor film.

[0043] Also, because the fuse blows in discrete steps has prescribed changes in resistance, the fuse described herein exhibits discrete resistance values. The discrete resistance values make the device amenable to digital sensing to determine whether it is in a blown or intact state. Additionally, the fuse may function as a programmable resistor having well-characterized resistor value options available to the user.

[0044] It should also be understood that the fuse of the invention will be used in a semiconductor environment and can be used in, for example, CMOS technology, Si on Insulator technology or SiGe technologies, to name a few. It is also well understood in the art that the insulator around the structure can be of different thermal conductivities.

[0045] While the invention has been described in terms of various embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that the invention can be practiced with modification and still remain within the spirit and scope of the appended

claims. For example, multiple fuse elements may be combined with multiple resistor elements to form a component which reverts to a specified resistive value in the event of fuse rupture.